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ABSTRACT

Despite movements to fight illiteracy in Laos, the number of illiterates in 1997 remains around 300,000 which represents 27% of people in the 15-40 age group. Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) techniques were adapted for teaching reading and writing in the Lao language. A pilot project implemented CLE techniques at nine pilot schools in two provinces. Due to this process, 17 district pedagogical advisors were acquainted with ways to follow up learning activities and another 17 grade one teachers were trained to use the "Starter books" and to implement all five phases of the CLE model. Preliminary results indicate that CLE teaching methods enable learners to be more active and to develop language skills: they tell stories to family members and friends; they begin to read words, phrases, and sentences; they draw and color pictures corresponding to concepts of the text; they role play and make "big books"; and they express their interest in and love for the Lao language. However, problems remained: teachers's basic competency is low, especially their language knowledge and skills; absenteeism among ethnic minority learners due to parents' agricultural field work is high; and school facilities are insufficient. Findings suggest that CLE can contribute to improving both child and adult literacy in Laos. (RS)

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Concentrated Language Encounter as a Starting Point to Improving Literacy in Lao PDR

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Concentrated Language Encounter as Starting Point to Improving Literacy in Lao PDR

by : Khamphay SISAVANH

A movement for fighting against illiteracy in Laos has existed over 30 years. In 1984, the country was proud of declaring that 98% of total target population became literates. Unfortunately, at the beginning of 1990 half a million Lao people remained illiterates or relapsed into illiteracy. This year a number of illiterates remains around 300,000 that covers 27% of people of age group 15-40. Among these people, there are a great number of drop-outs from primary education, who have relapsed into illiteracy.

Educationists make efforts to find the reasons which provoked such undesirable outcomes. Among them are the following:

- There is a lack of materials and financial support.
- There is an irrelevant curriculum to local needs.
- There is a lack of learner's interests in literacy.
- There are unqualified teachers or trainers who implement literacy programs.
- There is a traditional method of "fighting against illiteracy."

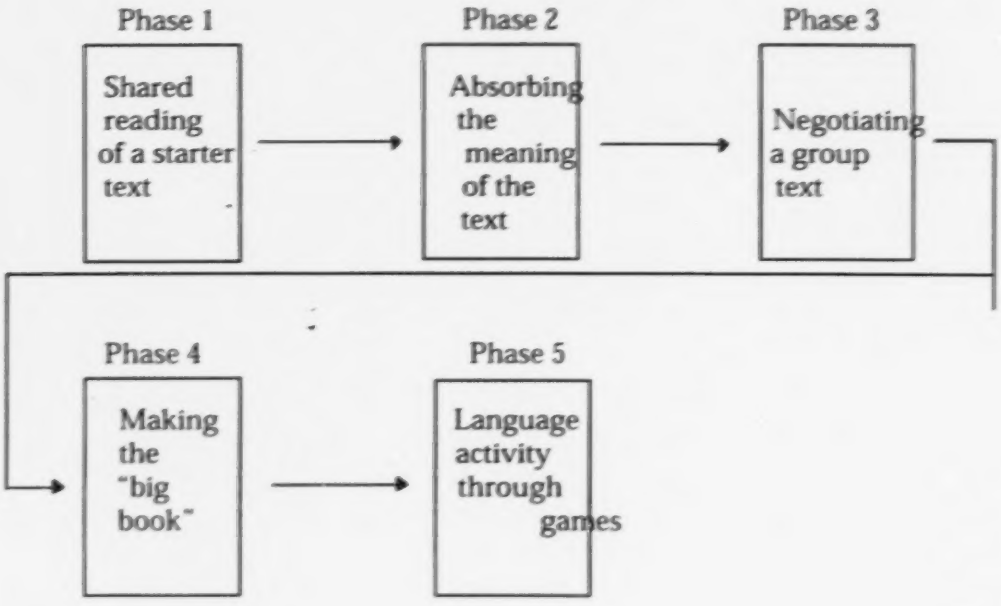
In this paper the focus will be placed on the issues related to methodology that could enable to resolve the problems which seem to be irremediable in the Lao context.

At the beginning of this year, a Committee for Improving Teaching of Lao Language (CITLL) was set up. The Committee consists of Lao language curriculum developers, professors from the National University, and the representatives of Department of General Education and Department of Teacher Training. All members of CITLL have been trained at the Srinakharinvirot University of Thailand on "Concentrated Language Encounter" (CLE) techniques adapted for teaching reading and writing in Lao language. It should note that CLE Methodology was laborated, tested and successfully implemented by Dr. Richard Walker in Australia, Dr. Saowalak Rattanavich in Thailand, and was currently widened in Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, Nepal and in the other countries of Southeast Asia and North America.

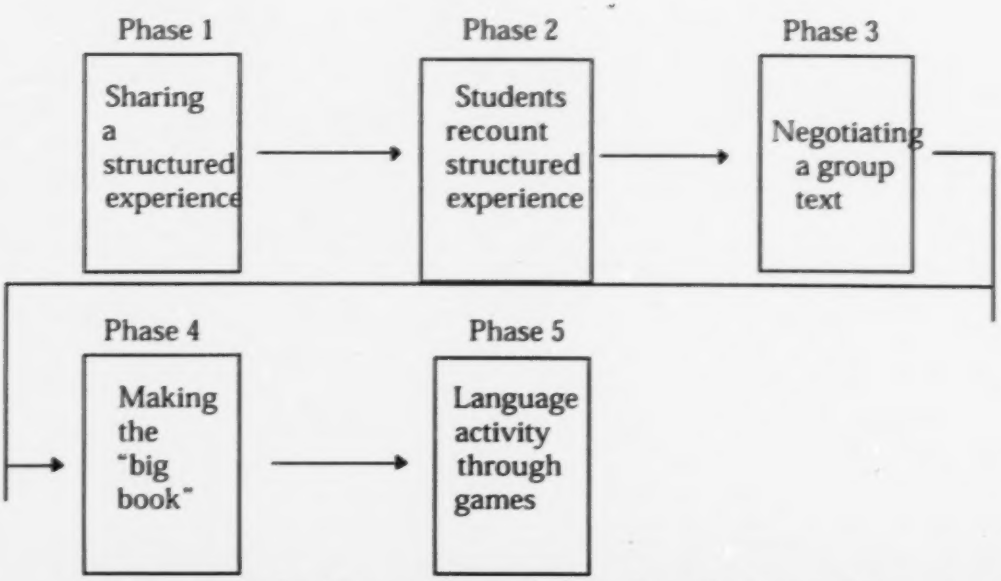
In Lao PDR we have started to tryout CLE teaching method at 9 pilot schools in two provinces. Due to this process, 17 district pedagogical advisors, school principals were acquainted with CLE and the ways to follow up learning activities and another 17 teachers of grade 1 were trained for using the "Starter books" and implementing all 5 phases of CLE model I for text-based unit and activity-based unit.

The following figure shows types of stages of CLE units that we borrowed from R. Walker, S. Rattanavich's works:

(a) Text-based



(b) Activity-based



Four starter books were compiled, and teachers use them to teach children of grade 1 in 17 classes during 4 months of second term. The assessment of student achievement will be done at the end of May. However,

the preliminary results of CLE teaching proved to be impressionable Two day meeting between CITLL members and pilot school teachers was held in mid March at the National Research Institute for Educational Science (NRIES) to review CLE teaching. During the meeting every teacher exchanged their views and experiences, made comments. According to the results of the meeting, the classroom observation, the discussion with school principals and pedagogical advisors we would like to give some conclusions:

CLE teaching method enables learners to be more active. After that they are able to develop language skills: they tell stories to parents, brothers and sisters, and friends, most of them begin to read in words, in phrases and then sentences. They draw and colour pictures corresponding to concepts of the reading text. They write quite correct. During language activities students take active participation in the role play, making the "Big Books" and learning games. Classroom atmosphere became more animated. Learners express their interests and love for Lao language. They enjoy learning. A number of absentees have been progressively reduced. Teacher's roles are raised and became acceptable from their colleagues and communities due to implementation of new teaching and learning approaches. Teachers have changed not only their teaching behaviour but also their attitudes to work by raising responsibility, respecting discipline and being more patient.

Nevertheless, some irremediable problems of teaching remained and need to be resolved:

- Teacher's basic competency is at low level, especially their language knowledge and skills.
- There is absenteeism among ethnic minority learners due to agricultural field works of their parents.
- School facilities are not sufficient: tables, benches, stationery.

In order to solve the above-mentioned problems, it is necessary to concentrate on the efforts from various partners and stakeholders of education, including administration and financial support from the Government, active participation of school personnel and international cooperation.

It is hoped that the Concentrated Language Encounter methodology is relevant to Lao multiethnic minority country. We are convinced that the CLE provides a great deal of promising learning achievements and makes considerable contributions to improving both child and adult literacy in Lao PDR.

Thank you..